BOUNDARIES
When to Say Yes, When to Say No
To Take Control of Your Life
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Boundaries define us. They define what is me and what is not me, a boundary shows me where I end and someone else begins, leading me to a sense of ownership. In addition to showing us what we are responsible for, boundaries help us to define what is not our responsibility. Boundaries are not walls, rather fences. Our fences need to have gates in them. This enables us to let the bad out and keep the good in. The important thing is that property lines be permeable enough to allow passing and strong enough to keep out danger. Often when people are abused while growing up, they reverse the function of boundaries and keep the bad in and the good out.

We are responsible for:
Our feelings & our attitudes and beliefs & our behaviors & our choices & our values
our limits & our talents & our thoughts & our desires & our love

Main Types of Boundary Problems

- **Compliants** – Saying “yes” to the bad. Compliant people have fuzzy and indistinct boundaries; they “melt” into the demands and needs of other people. They can’t stand alone, distinct from people who want something from them. Compliants, for example pretend to like the same restaurants and movies their friends do “just to get along.” They minimize their differences with others so as not to rock the boat. Compliants are chameleons. After a while it’s hard to distinguish them from their environment. This type of boundary problem paralyzes people’s no muscles. Whenever they need to protect themselves by saying no, the word catches in their throats. This happens for a number of different reasons:
  - Fear of hurting the other person’s feelings
  - Fear of abandonment and separateness
  - A wish to be totally dependent on another
  - Fear of someone else’s anger
  - Fear of punishment
  - Fear of being shamed
  - Fear of being seen as bad or selfish
  - Fear of being unspiritual
  - Fear of one’s overstrict, critical conscience
When parents teach children that setting boundaries or saying no is bad, they are teaching them that others can do with them as they wish. They are sending their children defenseless into a world that contains much evil. To feel safe in such a world, children need to have the power to say things like: no, I disagree, I will not, I choose not to, stop that, it hurts, its wrong, that’s bad. Blocking a child’s ability to say not handicaps that child for life. Adult’s with handicaps like this say yes to bad things.

- **Avoidants** – Saying “no” to the good. It’s the inability to ask for help, to recognize one’s own needs, to let others in. Avoidants withdraw when they are in need; they do not ask for the support of others. Why is avoidance a boundary problem? At the heart of the struggle is a confusion of
boundaries as walls. Individuals with walls for boundaries can let in neither
bad nor good. No one touches them.

- Controllers – Not respecting others’ boundaries. Controllers can’t respect
others’ limits. They resist taking responsibility for their lives, so they need to
control others. Controllers believe the old jokes about training top sales
people: no means maybe and maybe means yes. While this may be
productive in learning to sell a product, it can wreak havoc in a relationship.
Controllers are perceived as bullies, manipulative and aggressive. They use
various means of control to motivate others to carry the load intended to be theirs alone.

Controllers come in two types:
1. Aggressive controllers. These people clearly don’t listen to others’ boundaries. They run over
other people’s fences like a tank. They are sometimes verbally abusive, sometimes physically
abusive. But most of the time they simply aren’t aware that others even have boundaries. It’s
as if they live in a world of yes. There’s no place for someone else’s no. They attempt to get
others to change, to make the world fit their ideas of the way life should be. They neglect their
own responsibility to accept others as they are.
2. Manipulative controllers. Less honest than the aggressive controllers, manipulators try to
persuade people out of their boundaries. They talk others into yes. They indirectly manipulate
circumstances to get their way. They seduce others into carrying burdens. They use guilt
messages. Manipulators deny their desire to control others; they brush aside their own self-
centeredness.

Controllers are undisciplined people. They have little ability to curb their impulses or desires.
While it appears that they “get what they want in life” they are still slaves to their appetites.
Delaying gratification is difficult for them. That’s why they hate the word no from others. They
desperately need to learn to listen to the boundaries of others to help them observe their own.
Controllers are also limited in their ability to take responsibility for their own lives. Having relied
on bullying or indirectness, they can’t function on their own in the world. The only remedy is to
let controllers experience the consequences of their irresponsibility.
Finally controllers are isolated. People usually stay with them
out of fear, guilt, or dependency. If they’re honest, controllers
rarely feel loved. Why? Because in their heart of hearts, they
know that the only reason people spend time with them is because
they are pulling the strings. If they stopped threatening or
manipulating, they would be abandoned. We can’t terrorize
others or make them feel guilty and be loved by them at the same
time.

- Nonresponsive – Not hearing the needs of others.
Nonresponsive falls into two groups:
1. Those with a critical spirit toward others’ needs. They hate being incomplete in themselves.
   As a result, they ignore the needs of others.
2. Those who are so absorbed in their own desires and needs they exclude others (a form of
   narcissism).